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## WIND SONG

*by the same author*

**ABE LINCOLN GROWS UP**

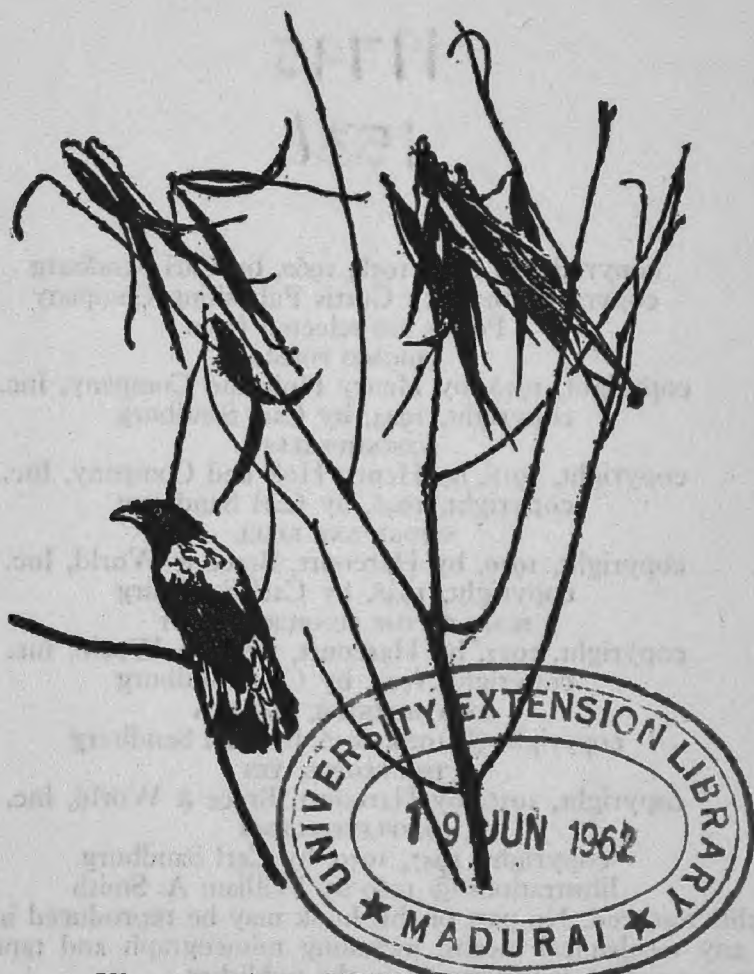
**EARLY MOON**

**ROOTABAGA STORIES**

**PRAIRIE-TOWN BOY**

# WIND SONG

CARL SANDBURG



*Illustrated by William A. Smith*

HARCOURT, BRACE & WORLD, INC., NEW YORK

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*To John Carl and Karlen Paula*

DEAR young folks:

Some poems may please you for  
half a minute & you don't care  
whether you keep them or not.

Other poems you may feel to be  
priceless & you hug them to your  
heart & keep them for sure.

Here in this book poems of each  
kind may be found: you do the finding.

I sign this book for you  
saying love & blessings: may luck  
stars ever be over you.

Carl Sandburg





# CONTENTS



Introduction	7
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## NEW POEMS

Bluebird, What Do You Feed On?	17
Never Two Songs the Same	18
Daybreak	19
Bee Song	19
Bubbles	20
Old Deep Sing-Song	21
Fourth of July Night	22
Sea Wisdom	23
Nightsong	24
Portrait of a Child Settling Down for an Afternoon Nap	25
Stars	26
Be Ready	27
Auctioneer	28
Sleep Song	29
Alice Corbin Is Gone	30
Lines Written for Gene Kelly to Dance To	31

## LITTLE PEOPLE

Little Girl, Be Careful What You Say	35
Children of the Desert	36

Buffalo Bill	37
We Must Be Polite	38
Arithmetic	39
Boxes and Bags	40
Sixteen Months	41
Margaret	42
Laughing Child	43
Sweeping Wendy: Study in Fugue	44
Child Margaret	45
Paper I	46
Paper II	47
Doors	48

## LITTLE ALBUM

Names	51
Proverbs	52
Home	53
Goldwing Moth	54
So to Speak	55
Circles	56
My People	57
Basket	57
Hats	58
Under a Hat Rim	59
Hits and Runs	60
New Hampshire Again	61
Niagara	63
Cheap Blue	64
Mother and Child	65

## CORN BELT

Improved Farm Land	69
Plowboy	70
Frog Songs	71
She Opens the Barn Door Every Morning	72
Summer Morning	73
Brown Gold	74
Ripe Corn	75
Cornhuskers	76
Haystacks	77
Harvest Sunset	78
Prairie Barn	79
Limited Crossing Wisconsin	80
Songs	81
Cornfield Ridge and Stream	82

## NIGHT

Night	85
Prairie Waters by Night	86
Timber Moon	87
Night Too Has Numbers	88
River Moons	89
Sleep Impression	90
Nocturne in a Deserted Brickyard	91
Between Two Hills	92
Window	93
Pods	94
Drowsy	95
Sheep	96



## BLOSSOM THEMES

Blossom Themes	99
Grassroots	101
Landscape	102
Little Sketch	103
Flowers Tell Months	104
Crisscross	105
Summer Grass	106
River Roads	107
On a Railroad Right of Way	108
Crabapples	109
Haze Gold	110
Winter Gold	111

## WIND, SEA, AND SKY

Winds of the Windy City	115
Children of the Wind	117
Docks	118
From the Shore	119
Flux	120
Sky Prayers	121
Rolling Clouds	122
Baby Song of the Four Winds	123
Broken Sky	124
Sante Fe Sketch	125
Silver Point	126
Wind Song	127

# WIND SONG





NEW POEMS







## BLUEBIRD, WHAT DO YOU FEED ON?

Bluebird, what do you feed on?

It is true you gobble up worms, you  
swallow bugs,

And your bill picks up corn, seed,  
berries.

This is only part of the answer.

Your feathers have captured a piece of  
smooth sky.

Your wings are burnished with  
lake-morning blue.

It is not a worm blue nor a bug  
blue nor the blue

Of corn or berry you shine with.

Bluebird, we come to you for facts,  
for valuable

Information, for secret reports.

Bluebird, tell us, what do you  
feed on?

## NEVER TWO SONGS THE SAME

the light on the leaves  
in girlish early spring  
    the deep green of the matron leaves  
    in the stride of high summer suns  
the colors of the turning oak and maple  
when October crosses gold and brown  
    there is winter then to wait for  
    when trees wear frost of a morning  
        wear snow of an evening  
when bare branches often reach out  
saying they would be lonely  
only for the wind coming  
with never two songs the same  
with changes always in the old songs

## DAYBREAK

Daybreak comes first  
in thin splinters shimmering.  
Neither is the day here  
nor is the night gone.  
Night is getting ready to go  
And Day whispers, "Soon now, soon."

## BEE SONG

Bees in the late summer sun  
Drone their song  
Of yellow moons  
Trimming black velvet,  
Droning, droning a sleepysong.



## BUBBLES

Two bubbles found they had rainbows on their curves.

They flickered out saying:

“It was worth being a bubble just to have held that  
rainbow thirty seconds.”

## OLD DEEP SING-SONG

in the old deep sing-song of the sea  
in the old going-on of that sing-song  
in that old mama-mama-mama going-on  
of that nightlong daylong sleepsong  
we look on we listen  
we lay by and hear  
too many big bells too many long gongs  
too many weepers over a lost gone gold  
too many laughs over light green gold  
woven and changing in the wash and the heave  
moving on the bottoms winding in the waters  
sending themselves with arms and voices  
up in the old mama-mama-mama music  
up into the whirl of spokes of light

## FOURTH OF JULY NIGHT

The little boat at anchor  
in black water sat murmuring  
to the tall black sky.

\*\*\*

A white sky bomb fizzed on a black line.  
A rocket hissed its red signature into the west.  
Now a shower of Chinese fire alphabets,  
a cry of flower pots broken in flames,  
a long curve to a purple spray,  
three violet balloons—  
Drips of seaweed tangled in gold,  
shimmering symbols of mixed numbers,  
tremulous arrangements of cream gold folds  
of a bride's wedding gown—

\*\*\*

A few sky bombs spoke their pieces,  
then velvet dark.

The little boat at anchor  
in black water sat murmuring  
to the tall black sky.

## SEA WISDOM

The sea was always the sea  
and a maker was the sea always.  
What the sea was making you may know  
by asking the sea and getting an answer.  
Well the sea knows its own importance.  
Well the sea will answer you when it knows  
your importance.



## NIGHTSONG

bring me now the bright flower  
of the moongold grass—  
let me have later on the horizon  
the black gold of moonset—  
spill for me then the bowl of dawn  
overshot and streaming—  
for men have often seen and taken  
night as a changing scene  
priceless yet paid for

## PORTRAIT OF A CHILD SETTLING DOWN FOR AN AFTERNOON NAP

Marquita had blossom fists  
and bubble toes.

I saw them, touched them,  
the same as an oak gnarled and worn  
when the wind bends it down  
to a frail hope of an oak  
and their leaves touch  
and branch whispers to branch.

“Baby say blossom for you are a blossom,  
Baby say bubble for you are a bubble,”

I said to Marquita.  
And as she lay ready  
and prepared to spit at the sky,  
I told her to spit in the face of the wind,  
not yet having learned what happens.

San Francisco lay in silver tones  
and the Golden Gate swaddled  
in frames of blue mountains  
while Marquita lay swathed as a sweet pig,  
pink as a fresh independent pig  
ready to spit at the sky.

## STARS

The stars are too many to count.  
The stars make sixes and sevens.  
The stars tell nothing—and everything.  
The stars look scattered.  
Stars are so far away they never speak  
when spoken to.

## BE READY

Be land ready  
for you shall go back to land.

Be sea ready  
for you have been nine-tenths water  
and the salt taste shall cling to your mouth.

Be sky ready  
for air, air, has been so needful to you—  
you shall go back, back to the sky.

## AUCTIONEER

Now I go down here and bring up a moon.  
How much am I bid for the moon?  
You see it a bright moon and brand-new.  
What can I get to start it? how much?  
What! who ever ever heard such a bid for a moon?  
Come now, gentlemen, come.  
This is a solid guaranteed moon.  
You may never have another chance  
to make a bid on such a compact  
eighteen-carat durable gold moon.  
You could shape a thousand wedding rings  
out of this moongold.  
I can guarantee the gold and the weddings  
will last forever  
and then a thousand years more.  
Come gentlemen, no nonsense, make me a bid.

## SLEEP SONG

Into any little room  
may come a tall steel bridge  
and a long white fog,  
changing lights and mist,  
moving as if a great sea  
and many mighty waters  
had come into that room  
easy with bundles of sleep,  
bundles of sea-moss sheen,  
shapes of sunset cunning,  
shifts of moonrise gold—  
    slow talk of low fog  
    on your forehead,  
    hands of cool fog  
    on your eyes—  
so let a sleep song be spoken—  
let spoken fog sheets come  
out of a long white harbor—  
let a slow mist deliver  
long bundles of sleep.

## ALICE CORBIN IS GONE

Alice Corbin is gone  
and the Indians tell us where.  
    She trusted the Indians  
    and they kept a trust in her.  
She took a four-line Indian song  
    and put it into English.  
You can sing it over and over:

The wind is carrying me round the sky;  
The wind is carrying me round the sky.  
    My body is here in the valley—  
The wind is carrying me round the sky.

## LINES WRITTEN FOR GENE KELLY TO DANCE TO

Spring is when the grass turns green and glad.

Spring is when the new grass comes up and says, "Hey, hey!  
Hey, hey!"

Be dizzy now and turn your head upside down and see how  
the world looks upside down.

Be dizzy now and turn a cartwheel, and see the good earth  
through a cartwheel.

Tell your feet the alphabet.

Tell your feet the multiplication table.

Tell your feet where to go, and watch 'em go and come back.

Can you dance a question mark?

Can you dance an exclamation point?

Can you dance a couple of commas?

And bring it to a finish with a period?

Can you dance like the wind is pushing you?

Can you dance like you are pushing the wind?

Can you dance with slow wooden heels

and then change to bright and singing silver heels?

Such nice feet, such good feet.

So long as grass grows and rivers run

Silver lakes like blue porcelain plates

Silver snakes of winding rivers.

You can see 'em on a map.



Why we got geography?

Because we go from place to place. Because the earth used to be flat and had four corners, and you could jump off from any of the corners.

But now the earth is not flat any more. Now it is round all over. Now it is a globe, a ball, round all over, and we would all fall off it and tumble away into space if it wasn't for the magnetic poles. And when you dance it is the North Pole or the South Pole pulling on your feet like magnets to keep your feet on the earth.

And that's why we got geography.

And it's nice to have it that way.

Why does duh Mississippi River wind and wind?

Why, dat's easy. She wind so she git where she wanna go.

Mississippi, Rappahannock, Punxatawney. Spell out their names with your heels.

Where duh towns uh Punxatawney and Mauk Chunk? Why, yeanh day's bof in Pennsylvan-ee-eye-ay.

And dat's why we got geography.

Left foot, tweedle-dum—right foot tweedle-dee, here they go.

When Yankee Doodle come to town, wot wuz he a-ridin' on?

A buffalo? A elephant? A horse?

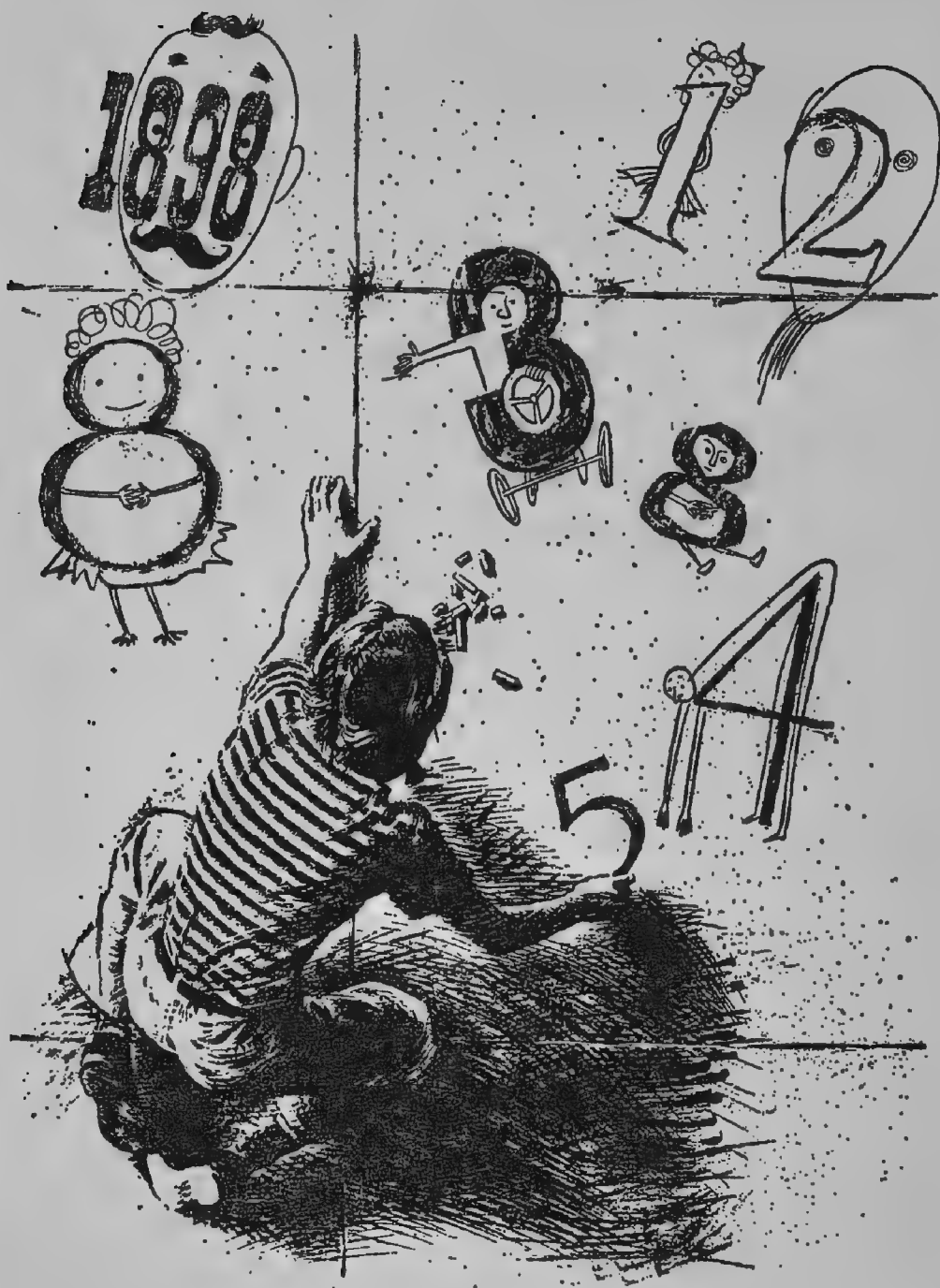
No, no, no, no. A pony it wuz, a pony.

That's right—

Giddi-ap, Giddi-ap, Giddi-ap, Giddi-ap.

Whoa! Whoa!

# LITTLE PEOPLE





## LITTLE GIRL, BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY

Little girl, be careful what you say  
when you make talk with words, words—  
for words are made of syllables  
and syllables, child, are made of air—  
and air is so thin—air is the breath of God—  
air is finer than fire or mist,  
finer than water or moonlight,  
finer than spider-webs in the moon,  
finer than water-flowers in the morning:  
    and words are strong, too,  
    stronger than rocks or steel  
stronger than potatoes, corn, fish, cattle,  
and soft, too, soft as little pigeon-eggs,  
soft as the music of hummingbird wings.

    So, little girl, when you speak greetings,  
when you tell jokes, make wishes or prayers,  
    be careful, be careless, be careful,  
    be what you wish to be.

CHILDREN OF THE DESERT  
from *The People, Yes*

I.

The old timer on the desert was gray  
and grizzled with ever seeing the sun:  
“For myself I don’t care whether it rains.  
I’ve seen it rain.  
But I’d like to have it rain  
pretty soon sometime.  
Then my son could see it.  
He’s never seen it rain.”

2.

“What is the east? Have you been in the east?”  
the New Jersey woman asked the little girl  
the wee child growing up in Arizona who said:  
“Yes, I’ve been in the east,  
the east is where trees come  
between you and the sky.”

## BUFFALO BILL

Boy heart of Johnny Jones—aching today?  
Aching, and Buffalo Bill in town?  
Buffalo Bill and ponies, cowboys, Indians?

Some of us know  
All about it, Johnny Jones.  
Buffalo Bill is a slanting look of the eyes,  
    A slanting look under a hat on a horse.  
He sits on a horse and a passing look is fixed  
    On Johnny Jones, you and me, barelegged,  
A slanting, passing, careless look under a hat on a horse.

Go clickety-clack, O pony hoofs along the street.  
Come on and slant your eyes again, O Buffalo Bill.  
Give us again the ache of our boy hearts.  
Fill us again with the red love of prairies,  
    dark nights, lonely wagons,  
    and the crack-crack of rifles  
    sputtering flashes into an ambush.

WE MUST BE POLITE  
(*Lessons for children on how to behave under  
peculiar circumstances*)

I

If we meet a gorilla  
what shall we do?  
Two things we may do  
if we so wish to do.

Speak to the gorilla,  
very, very respectfully,  
“How do you do, sir?”

Or, speak to him with less  
distinction of manner,  
“Hey, why don’t you go back  
where you came from?”

2

If an elephant knocks on your door  
and asks for something to eat,  
there are two things to say:

Tell him there are nothing but cold  
victuals in the house and he will do  
better next door.

Or say: We have nothing but six bushels  
of potatoes—will that be enough for  
your breakfast, sir?

## ARITHMETIC

Arithmetic is where numbers fly like pigeons in and out of your head.

Arithmetic tells you how many you lose or win if you know how many you had before you lost or won.

Arithmetic is seven eleven all good children go to heaven—or five six bundle of sticks.

Arithmetic is numbers you squeeze from your head to your hand to your pencil to your paper till you get the answer.

Arithmetic is where the answer is right and everything is nice and you can look out of the window and see the blue sky—or the answer is wrong and you have to start all over and try again and see how it comes out this time.

If you take a number and double it and double it again and then double it a few more times, the number gets bigger and bigger and goes higher and higher and only arithmetic can tell you what the number is when you decide to quit doubling.

Arithmetic is where you have to multiply—and you carry the multiplication table in your head and hope you won't lose it.

If you have two animal crackers, one good and one bad, and you eat one and a striped zebra with streaks all over him eats the other, how many animal crackers will you have if somebody offers you five six seven and you say No no no and you say Nay nay nay and you say Nix nix nix?

If you ask your mother for one fried egg for breakfast and she gives you two fried eggs and you eat both of them, who is better in arithmetic, you or your mother?



## BOXES AND BAGS

The bigger the box the more it holds.

Empty boxes hold the same as empty heads.

Enough small empty boxes thrown into a big empty box  
fill it full.

A half-empty box says, "Put more in."

A big enough box could hold the world.

Elephants need big boxes to hold a dozen  
elephant handkerchiefs.

Fleas fold little handkerchiefs and fix them  
nice and neat in flea handkerchief boxes.

Bags lean against each other  
and boxes stand independent.

Boxes are square with corners  
unless round with circles.

Box can be piled on box  
till the whole works come tumbling.

Pile box on box and the bottom box says,  
"If you will kindly take notice  
you will see it all rests on me."

Pile box on box and the top one says,  
"Who falls farthest if or when we fall? I ask you."

Box people go looking for boxes  
and bag people go looking for bags.

## SIXTEEN MONTHS

On the lips of the child Janet float changing dreams.  
It is a thin spiral of blue smoke,  
A morning campfire at a mountain lake.

On the lips of the child Janet,  
Wisps of haze on ten miles of corn,  
Young light blue calls to young light gold of morning.

## MARGARET

Many birds and the beating of wings  
Make a flinging reckless hum  
In the early morning at the rocks  
Above the blue pool  
Where the gray shadows swim lazy.

In your blue eyes, O reckless child,  
I saw today many little wild wishes,  
Eager as the great morning.

LAUGHING CHILD  
from *Three Spring Notations on Bipeds*

---

The child is on my shoulders.  
In the prairie moonlight the child's legs  
hang over my shoulders.  
She sits on my neck and I hear her calling  
me a good horse.  
She slides down—and into the moon silver of  
a prairie stream.  
She throws a stone and laughs at the clug-clug.

## SWEEPING WENDY: STUDY IN FUGUE

Wendy put her black eyes on me  
and swept me with her black eyes—  
sweep on sweep she swept me.

Have you ever seen Wendy?  
Have you ever seen her sweep  
Keeping her black eyes on you  
keeping you eyeswept?

## CHILD MARGARET

The child Margaret begins to write numbers on a Saturday morning, the first numbers formed under her wishing child fingers.

All the numbers come well-born, shaped in figures assertive for a frieze in a child's room.

Both 1 and 7 are straightforward, military, filled with lunge and attack, erect in shoulder-straps.

The 6 and 9 salute as dancing sisters, elder and younger, and 2 is a trapeze actor swinging to handclaps.

All the numbers are well-born, only 3 has a hump on its back and 8 is knock-kneed.

The child Margaret kisses all once and gives two kisses to 3 and 8.

(Each number is a brand-new rag doll. . . . O in the wishing fingers . . . millions of rag dolls, millions and millions of new rag dolls!!)

## PAPER I

Paper is two kinds, to write on, to wrap with.

If you like to write, you write.

If you like to wrap, you wrap.

Some papers like writers, some like wrappers.

Are you a writer or a wrapper?

## PAPER II

I write what I know on one side of the paper  
and what I don't know on the other.

Fire likes dry paper and wet paper laughs at  
fire.

Empty paper sacks say, "Put something in me,  
what are we waiting for?"

Paper sacks packed to the limit say, "We hope  
we don't bust."

Paper people like to meet other paper people.



## DOORS

An open door says, "Come in."

A shut door says, "Who are you?"

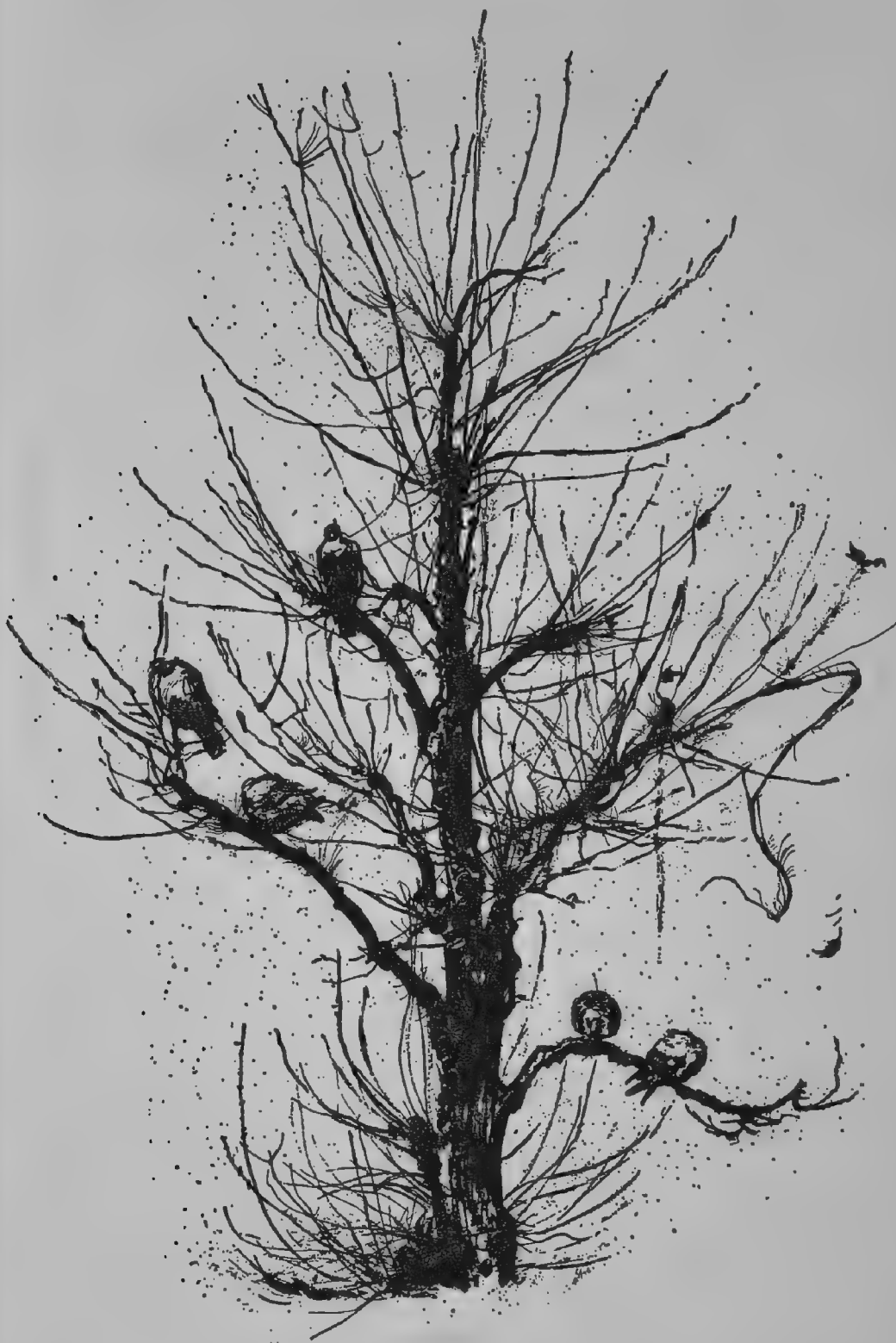
Shadows and ghosts go through shut doors.

If a door is shut and you want it shut,  
    why open it?

If a door is open and you want it open,  
    why shut it?

Doors forget but only doors know what it is  
    doors forget.

# LITTLE ALBUM





## NAMES

from PROLOGUE to *The Family of Man*

There is only one horse on the earth  
and his name is All Horses.

There is only one bird in the air  
and his name is All Wings.

There is only one fish in the sea  
and his name is All Fins.

There is only one man in the world  
and his name is All Men.

There is only one woman in the world  
and her name is All Women.

There is only one child in the world  
and the child's name is All Children.

There is only one Maker in the world  
and His children cover the earth  
and they are named All God's Children.

PROVERBS  
from *The People, Yes*

We'll see what we'll see.  
Time is a great teacher.  
Today me and tomorrow maybe you.  
This old anvil laughs at many broken hammers.  
What is bitter to stand against today may be sweet to remember tomorrow.  
Whether the stone bumps the jug or the jug bumps the stone  
it is bad for the jug.  
We all belong to the same big family and have the same smell.  
Handling honey, tar or dung some of it sticks to the fingers.  
The liar comes to believe his own lies.  
He who burns himself must sit on the blisters.  
God alone understands fools.

The sea has fish for every man.  
Every blade of grass has its share of dew.  
The longest day must have its end.  
Man's life? A candle in the wind, hoar-frost  
on stone.  
Nothing more certain than death and nothing  
more uncertain than the hour.  
Men live like birds together in a wood; when  
the time comes each takes his flight.  
As wave follows wave, so new men take old  
men's places.

## HOME

*from Poems Done on a Late Night Car*

Here is a thing my heart wishes  
the world had more of:  
I heard it in the air of one night  
when I listened to a mother  
singing softly to a child  
restless and angry in the darkness.

## GOLDWING MOTH

A goldwing moth is between the scissors  
and the ink bottle on the desk.  
Last night it flew hundreds of circles  
around a glass bulb and a flame wire.  
The wings are a soft gold;  
It is the gold of illuminated initials  
in manuscripts of the medieval monks.

## SO TO SPEAK

Dreams, graves, pools, growing  
flowers, cornfields—these are  
silent, so to speak.

Northwest blizzards, sea rocks  
apounding in high wind, southeast  
sleet after a thaw—these are heard,  
so to speak.



CIRCLES  
from *The People, Yes*

The white man drew a small circle in the sand  
and told the red man,  
“This is what the Indian knows,”  
And drawing a big circle around the small one,  
“This is what the white man knows.”

The Indian took the stick  
And swept an immense ring around both circles:  
“This is where the white man and the red man  
know nothing.”

## MY PEOPLE

My people are gray,  
    pigeon gray, dawn gray, storm gray.  
I call them beautiful,  
    and I wonder where they are going.

## BASKET

Speak, sir, and be wise.  
Speak choosing your words, sir,  
    like an old woman over a bushel  
    of apples.

## HATS

Hats, where do you belong?  
what is under you?

On the rim of a skyscraper's forehead  
I looked down and saw: hats: fifty thousand hats:  
Swarming with a noise of bees and sheep, cattle and water-  
falls,  
Stopping with a silence of sea grass, a silence of prairie corn.  
Hats: tell me your high hopes.

## UNDER A HAT RIM

While the hum and the hurry  
Of passing footfalls  
Beat in my ear like the restless surf  
Of a wind-blown sea,  
A soul came to me  
Out of the look on a face.

Eyes like a lake  
Where a storm-wind roams  
Caught me from under  
The rim of a hat.  
I thought of a midsea wreck  
and bruised fingers clinging  
to a broken stateroom door.



## HITS AND RUNS

I remember the Chillicothe ball players  
    grappling the Rock Island ball players  
    in a sixteen-inning game ended by darkness.  
And the shoulders of the Chillicothe players  
    were a red smoke against the sundown  
    and the shoulders of the Rock Island players  
    were a yellow smoke against the sundown.  
And the umpire's voice was hoarse  
    calling balls and strikes and outs  
    and the umpire's throat fought in the dust  
    for a song.

## NEW HAMPSHIRE AGAIN

I remember black winter waters,  
I remember thin white birches,  
I remember sleepy twilight hills,  
I remember riding across New  
Hampshire lengthways.

I remember a station named  
"Halcyon," a brakeman call-  
ing to passengers "Halcyon!!  
Halcyon!!"

I remember having heard the  
gold diggers dig out only  
enough for wedding rings.

I remember a stately child tell-  
ing me her father gets letters  
addressed "Robert Frost, New  
Hampshire."

I remember an old Irish saying,  
"His face is like a fiddle and  
every one who sees him must  
love him."

I have one remember, two re-  
members, ten remembers; I  
have a little handkerchief  
bundle of remembers.

One early evening star just over  
a cradle moon,

One dark river with a spatter of  
later stars caught,  
One funnel of a motorcar head-  
light up a hill,  
One team of horses hauling a  
bobsled load of wood,  
One boy on skis picking himself  
up after a tumble—  
I remember one and a one and a  
one riding across New Hamp-  
shire lengthways: I have a lit-  
tle handkerchief bundle of re-  
members.

NIAGARA  
from *The People, Yes*

The tumblers of the rapids go white, go green,  
go changing over the gray, the brown, the rocks.  
The fight of the water, the stones,  
the fight makes a foam laughter  
before the last look over the long slide  
down the spread of a sheen in the straight fall.

Then the growl, the chatter,  
down under the boom and the muffle,  
the hoo hoi deep,  
the hoo hoi down,  
this is Niagara.



## CHEAP BLUE

Hill blue among the leaves in summer,  
Hill blue among the branches in winter—  
Light sea blue at the sand beaches in winter,  
Deep sea blue in the deep deep waters—  
Prairie blue, mountain blue—

Who can pick a pocketful of these blues,  
a handkerchief of these blues,  
And go walking, talking, walking as though  
God gave them a lot of loose change  
For spending money, to throw at the birds,  
To flip into the tin cups of blind men?

## MOTHER AND CHILD

from *The People, Yes*

“I love you,”  
said a great mother.  
“I love you for what you are  
knowing so well what you are.  
And I love you more yet, child,  
deeper yet than ever, child,  
for what you are going to be,  
knowing so well you are going far,  
knowing your great works are ahead,  
ahead and beyond,  
yonder and far over yet.”



# CORN BELT





## IMPROVED FARM LAND

Tall timber stood here once,  
here on a corn belt farm along the Monon.  
Here the roots of a half mile of trees  
dug their runners deep in the loam  
for a grip and a hold against windstorms.  
Then the axmen came and the chips flew  
to the zing of steel and handle—  
the lank railsplitters cut the big ones first,  
the beeches and the oaks, then the brush.  
Dynamite, wagons and horses took the stumps—  
the plows sunk their teeth in—  
now it is first-class corn land—improved property—  
and the hogs grunt over the fodder crops.  
It would come hard now for this half mile of improved farm  
land  
along the Monon corn belt,  
on a piece of Grand Prairie,  
to remember once it had a great singing family of trees.

## PLOWBOY

After the last red sunset glimmer,  
Black on the line of a low hill rise,  
Formed into moving shadows, I saw  
A plowboy and two horses lined against the gray,  
Plowing in the dusk the last furrow.  
The turf had a gleam of brown,  
And smell of soil was in the air,  
And, cool and moist, a haze of April.

I shall remember you long,  
Plowboy and horses against the sky in shadow.  
I shall remember you and the picture  
You made for me,  
Turning the turf in the dusk  
And haze of an April gloaming.

1908

## FROG SONGS

The silver burbles of the frogs wind and swirl.

The lines of their prongs swing up in a spray.

They cut the air with bird line curves.

The eye sees nothing, the ear is filled, the head remembers

The beat of the swirl of frog throat silver prongs

In the early springtime when eggs open, when feet learn,

When the crying of the water begins a new year.



## SHE OPENS THE BARN DOOR EVERY MORNING

Open the barn door, farm woman,  
It is time for the cows to be milked.  
Their udders are full from the sleep night.  
Open the door with your right hand shutting a cleat,  
Your left hand pulling a handle.  
The smell of the barn is let out to the pastures.  
Dawn lets itself in at the open door.  
A cow let out in the barnyard all the night  
Looks on as though you do this every morning.  
Open the barn door, farm woman, you do it  
As you have done it five hundred times.  
As a sleep woman heavy with the earth,  
Clean as a milk pail washed in the sun,  
You open the barn door a half mile away  
And a cow almost turns its head and looks on.

SUMMER MORNING  
from *Prairie*

A wagonload of radishes on a summer morning.  
Sprinkles of dew on the crimson-purple balls.  
The farmer on the seat dangles the reins  
    on the rumps of dapple-gray horses.  
The farmer's daughter with a basket of eggs  
    dreams of a new hat to wear to the county fair.

1911

## BROWN GOLD

The time of the brown gold comes softly.

Oat shocks are alive in brown gold belts,  
the short and the shambling oat shocks  
sit on the stubble and straw.

The timothy hay, the fodder corn, the cabbage  
and the potatoes, across their leaves are  
footsteps.

There is a bold green up over the cracks in  
the corn rows where the crickets go criss-  
cross errands, where the bugs carry pack-  
ages.

Flutter and whirr, you birdies, you newcomers  
in lines and sashes, tellers of harvest  
weather on the way, belts of brown gold  
coming softly.

It is very well the old-time streamers take  
up the old-time gold haze against the west-  
ern timber line.

It is the old time again when months and birds  
tell each other, "Oh, very well," and repeat it  
where the fields and the timber lines meet  
in belts of brown gold hazes, "Oh, very  
well, Oh, very well."

## RIPE CORN

The wind blows.

The corn leans.

The corn leaves go rustling.

The march time and the windbeat  
are on October drums.

The stalks of fodder bend all one way,  
the way the last windstorm passed.

“Put on my winter clothes;  
get me an ulster—a yellow ulster—  
to lay down in in January  
and shut my eyes  
and cover my ears  
in snowdrifts.”

The wind blows.

The corn leans.

The fodder is russet.

October says to the leaves,  
“Rustle now to the last lap,  
to the last leg of the year.”

## CORNHUSKERS

The frost loosens cornhusks.  
The sun, the rain, the wind  
    loosen cornhusks.  
The men and women are helpers.  
They are all cornhuskers together.  
I see them late in the western evening  
    in a smoke-red dust.

## HAYSTACKS

After the sunburn of the day  
handling a pitchfork at a hayrack,  
after the eggs and biscuit and coffee,  
the pearl-gray haystacks  
in the gloaming  
are cool prayers  
to the harvest hands.

## HARVEST SUNSET

Red gold of pools,  
Sunset furrows six o'clock,  
And the farmer done in the fields  
And the cows in the barns with bulging udders.

Take the cows and the farmer,  
Take the barns and bulging udders.  
Leave the red gold of pools  
And sunset furrows six o'clock.  
The farmer's wife is singing.  
The farmer's boy is whistling.  
I wash my hands in red gold of pools.

PRAIRIE BARN  
from *The People, Yes*

For sixty years the pine lumber barn  
had held cows, horses, hay, harness, tools, junk,  
amid the prairie winds of Knox County, Illinois  
and the corn crops came and went, plows and wagons,  
and hands milked, hands husked and harnessed  
and held the leather reins of horse teams  
in dust and dog days, in late fall sleet  
till the work was done that fall.

And the barn was a witness, stood and saw it all.

“That old barn on your place, Charlie,  
was nearly falling last time I saw it,  
how is it now?”

“I got some poles to hold it on the east side  
and the wind holds it up on the west.”



LIMITED CROSSING WISCONSIN  
from *Prairie*

A headlight searches a snowstorm.  
A funnel of white light shoots from over the pilot  
of the Pioneer Limited crossing Wisconsin.

In the morning hours, in the dawn,  
The sun puts out the stars of the sky  
And the headlight of the Limited train.

The fireman waves his hand  
to a country school teacher on a bobsled.  
A boy, yellow hair, red scarf and mittens,  
on the bobsled, in his lunch box  
a pork chop sandwich and a V of gooseberry pie.

The horses fathom a snow to their knees.  
Snow hats are on the rolling prairie hills.  
The Mississippi bluffs wear snow hats.

SONGS  
from *Prairie*

When the morning sun is on the trumpet-vine blossoms,

Sing at the kitchen pans:

Shout All Over God's Heaven.

When the rain slants on the potato hills

And the sun plays a silver shaft on the last shower,

Sing to the bush at the backyard fence:

Mighty Lak a Rose.

When the icy sleet pounds on the storm windows

And the house lifts to a great breath,

Sing for the outside hills:

The Ole Sheep Done Know the Road,

the Young Lambs Must Find the Way.

## CORNFIELD RIDGE AND STREAM

The top of the ridge is a cornfield.  
It rests all winter under snow.  
It feeds the broken snowdrifts in spring  
To a clear stream cutting down hill to the river.  
Late in summer the stream dries; rabbits run and  
birds hop along the dry mud bottom.  
Fall time comes and it fills with leaves; oaks and  
shagbark hickories drop their summer hats,  
ribbons, handkerchiefs.  
“This is how I keep warm all winter,” the stream  
murmurs, waiting till the snowdrifts melt and  
the ice loosens and the clear singing babble  
of spring comes back.

# NIGHT





NIGHT  
from *The Windy City*

Night gathers itself into a ball of dark yarn.  
Night loosens the ball and it spreads.  
The lookouts from the shores of Lake Michigan  
find night follows day,  
and ping! ping! across sheet gray  
the boat lights put their signals.  
Night lets the dark yarn unravel,  
Night speaks and the yarns change  
to fog and blue strands.

## PRAIRIE WATERS BY NIGHT

Chatter of birds two by two  
raises a night song  
joining a litany of running water—  
sheer waters showing the russet of old stones  
remembering many rains.

And the long willows drowse  
on the shoulders of the running water,  
and sleep from much music;  
joined songs of day-end,  
feathery throats and stony waters,  
in a choir chanting new psalms.

It is too much for the long willows  
when low laughter of a red moon comes down;  
and the willows drowse and sleep  
on the shoulders of the running water.

## TIMBER MOON

There is a way the moon looks into the timber at night  
And tells the walnut trees secrets of silver sand—  
There is a way the moon makes a lattice work  
Under the leaves of the hazel bushes—  
There is a way the moon understands the hoot owl  
Sitting on an arm of a sugar maple throwing its  
One long lonesome cry up the ladders of the moon—  
There is a way the moon finds company early in the fall  
time.



## NIGHT TOO HAS NUMBERS

from *The People, Yes*

In the long flat panhandle of Texas  
far off on the grassland of the cattle country  
near noon they sight a rider coming toward them  
and the sky may be a cold neverchanging gray  
or the sky may be changing its numbers  
back and forth all day even and odd numbers  
and the afternoon slides away somewhere  
and they see their rider is alive yet  
their rider is coming nearer yet  
and they expect what happens and it happens again  
he and his horse ride in late for supper  
yet not too late  
and night is on and the stars are out  
and night too slides away somewhere  
night too has even and odd numbers.

## RIVER MOONS

The double moon,  
    one on the high backdrop of the west,  
    one on the curve of the river face,

The sky moon of fire  
and the river moon of water,  
    I am taking these home in a basket  
    hung on an elbow,  
    such a teeny-weeny elbow,  
    in my head.

I saw them last night,  
    a cradle moon, two horns of a moon,  
    such an early hopeful moon,  
    such a child's moon  
    for all young hearts  
    to make a picture of.

The river—I remember this like a picture—  
    the river was the upper twist  
    of a written question mark.

I know now it takes  
    many many years to write a river,  
    a twist of water asking a question.

And white stars moved when the moon moved,  
    and one red star kept burning,  
    and the Big Dipper was almost overhead.

## SLEEP IMPRESSION

The dark blue wind  
ran on the early autumn sky  
in the fields of yellow moon harvest.

I slept, I almost slept,

I said listening:

Trees you have leaves rustling like rain  
when there is no rain.

## NOCTURNE IN A DESERTED BRICKYARD

Stuff of the moon  
Runs on the lapping sand  
Out to the longest shadows.  
Under the curving willows,  
And round the creep of the wave line,  
Fluxions of yellow and dusk on the waters  
Make a wide dreaming pansy of an old pond in the night.

## BETWEEN TWO HILLS

Between two hills  
The old town stands.  
The houses loom  
And the roofs and trees  
And the dusk and the dark,  
The damp and the dew  
Are there.

The prayers are said  
And the people rest  
For sleep is there  
And the touch of dreams  
Is over all.

## WINDOW

Night from a railroad car window  
Is a great, dark, soft thing  
Broken across with slashes of light.

## PODS

Pea pods cling to stems.  
Neponset, the village,  
Clings to the Burlington railway main line.  
Terrible midnight limiteds roar through  
Hauling sleepers to the Rockies and Sierras.  
The earth is slightly shaken  
And Neponset trembles slightly in its sleep.

## DROWSY

Sleep is the gift of many spiders  
The webs tie down the sleepers easy.

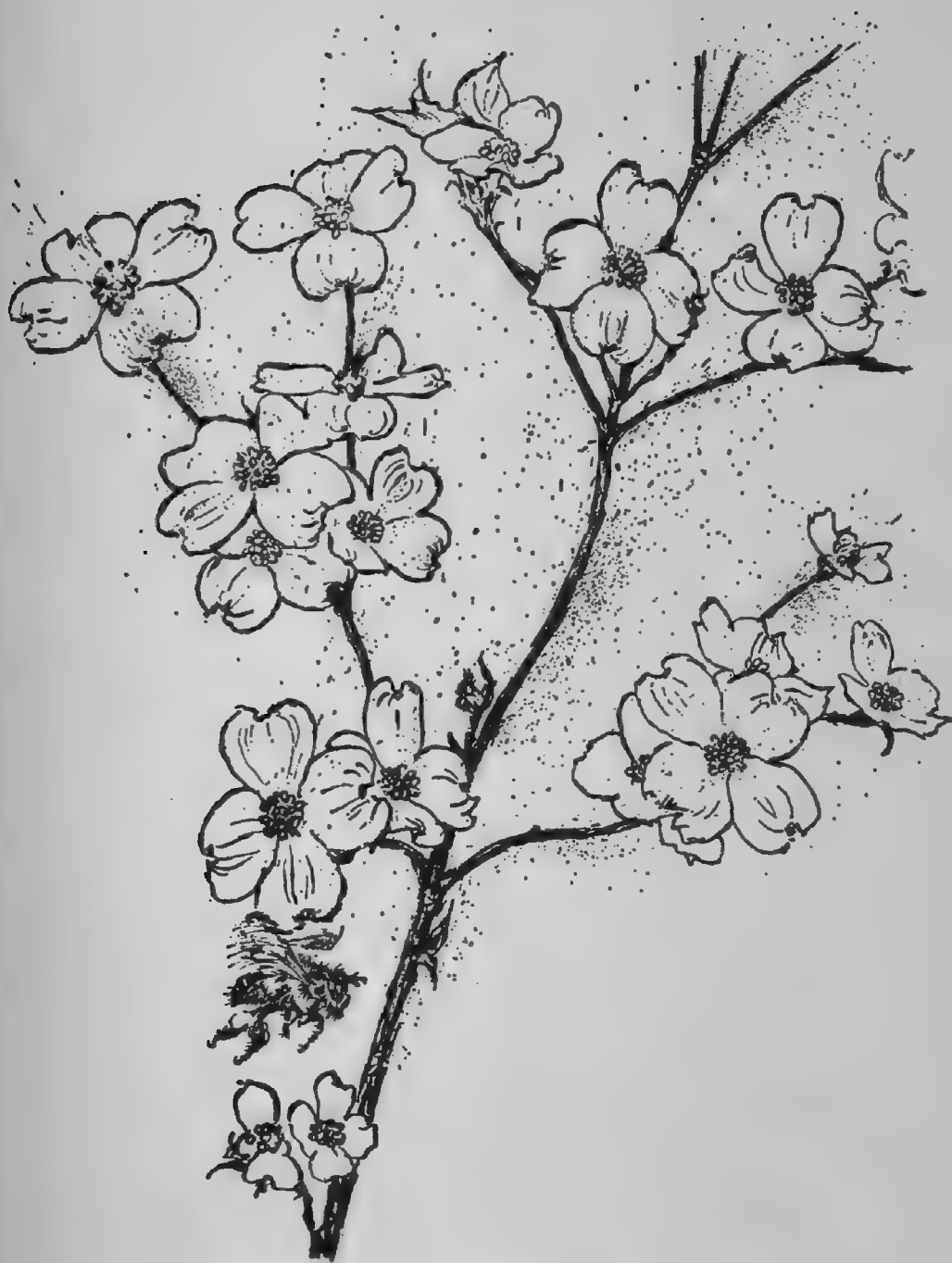


## SHEEP

Thousands of sheep, soft-footed, black-nosed sheep—  
one by one going up the hill and over the fence—  
one by one four-footed pattering up and over—  
one by one wiggling their stub tails as they take  
    the short jump and go over—  
one by one silently unless for the multitudinous drumming  
    of their hoofs as they move on and go over—  
thousands and thousands of them in the gray haze of evening  
    just after sundown—  
one by one slanting in a long line to pass over the hill—

I am the slow, long-legged Sleepyman and I love you sheep  
    in Persia, California, Argentina, Australia, or Spain—  
you are the thoughts that help me when I, the Sleepyman,  
lay my hands on the eyelids of the children of the world  
    at eight o'clock every night—  
you thousands and thousands of sheep in a procession of dusk  
making an endless multitudinous drumming on the hills  
    with your hoofs.

# BLOSSOM THEMES





## BLOSSOM THEMES

### I

Late in the winter came one day  
When there was a whiff on the wind,  
a suspicion, a cry not to be heard  
    of perhaps blossoms, perhaps green  
    grass and clean hills lifting roll-  
    ing shoulders.

Does the nose get the cry of spring  
    first of all? is the nose thankful  
    and thrilled first of all?

### 2

If the blossoms come down  
so they must fall on snow  
because spring comes this year  
before winter is gone,  
then both snow and blossoms look sad;  
peaches, cherries, the red summer apples,  
all say it is a hard year.

The wind has its own way of picking off  
the smell of peach blossoms and then  
carrying that smell miles and miles.

Women washing dishes in lonely farmhouses  
stand at the door and say, "Something is  
happening."

A little foam of the summer sea  
of blossoms,  
a foam finger of white leaves,  
shut these away—  
high into the summer wind runners.  
Let the wind be white too.

## GRASSROOTS

Grass clutches at the dark dirt with finger holds.  
Let it be blue grass, barley, rye or wheat,  
Let it be button weed or butter-and-eggs,  
Let it be Johnny-jump-ups springing clean blue streaks.  
Grassroots down under put fingers into dark dirt.

## LANDSCAPE

See the trees lean to the wind's way of learning.

See the dirt of the hills shape to the water's  
way of learning.

See the lift of it all go the way the biggest  
wind and the strongest water want it.

## LITTLE SKETCH

There are forked branches of trees  
Where the leaves shudder obediently,  
Where the hangover leaves  
Flow in a curve downward;  
And between the forks and leaves,  
In patches and angles, in square handfuls,  
The orange lights of the done sunset  
Come and filter and pour.



## FLOWERS TELL MONTHS

Gold buttons in the garden today—

Among the brown-eyed susans the golden spiders are  
gamboling.

The blue sisters of the white asters speak to each other.

After the travel of the snows—

Buttercups come in a yellow rain,

Johnny-jump-ups in a blue mist—

Wild azaleas with a low spring cry.

## CRISSCROSS

Spring crosses over into summer.  
This is as it always was.

Buds on the redhaw, beetles in the loam,  
And the interference of the green leaves  
At the blue roofs of the spring sky  
Crossing over into summer—  
These are ways, this is out and on.  
This always was.

The tumble out and the push up,  
The breaking of the little doors,  
The look again at the mother sun,  
The feel of the blue roofs over—  
This is summer? This always was?

The whispering sprigs of buds stay put.  
The spiders are after the beetles.  
The farmer is driving a tractor turning furrows.  
The hired man drives a manure spreader.  
The oven bird hops in dry leaves.  
The woodpecker beats his tattoo.  
Is this it? Is spring crossing over?  
Is it summer? And this always was?  
The whispering pinks, the buds on the redhaw,  
The blue roofs of the sky . . . stay put.

## SUMMER GRASS

Summer grass aches and whispers.

It wants something;  
it calls out and sings;  
it pours out wishes to the overhead stars.

The rain hears;  
the rain answers;  
the rain is slow coming;  
the rain wets the face of the grass.

## RIVER ROADS

Let the crows go by hawking their caw and caw.  
They have been swimming in midnights of coal mines somewhere.  
Let 'em hawk their caw and caw.

Let the woodpecker drum and drum on a hickory stump.  
He has been swimming in red and blue pools somewhere  
hundreds of years  
And the blue has gone to his wings and the red has gone to  
his head.  
Let his red head drum and drum.

Let the dark pools hold the birds in a looking-glass.  
And if the pool wishes, let it shiver to the blur of many  
wings, old swimmers from old places.

Let the redwing streak a line of vermillion on the green  
wood lines.  
And the mist along the river fix its purple in lines of a  
woman's shawl on lazy shoulders.

## ON A RAILROAD RIGHT OF WAY

Stream, go hide yourself.  
In the tall grass, in the cat-tails,  
In the browns of autumn, the last purple  
    asters, the yellow whispers.  
On the moss rock levels leave the marks  
    of your wave-lengths.  
Sing in your gravel, in your clean gully.  
Let the moaning railroad trains go by.  
Till they stop you, go on with your song.

The minnies spin in the water gravel,  
In the spears of the early autumn sun.  
There must be winter fish.  
Babies, you will be jumping fish  
In the first snow month.

## CRABAPPLES

Sweeten these bitter wild crabapples,  
Illinois October sun.

The roots here came from the wilderness,  
came before man came here.  
They are bitter as the wild is bitter.

Give these crabapples your softening gold,  
October sun.  
Go through to the white wet seeds inside  
and soften them black.  
Make these bitter apples sweet.  
They want you, sun.

The drop and the fall,  
the drop and the fall,  
the apples leaving the branches  
for the black earth under,  
they know you from last year,  
the year before last year,  
October sun.

## HAZE GOLD

Sun, you may send your haze gold  
Filling the fall afternoon  
With a flimmer of many gold feathers.  
Leaves, you may linger in the fall sunset  
Like late lingering butterflies before frost.  
Treetops, you may sift the sunset cross-lights  
Spreading a loose checkerwork of gold and shadow.  
Winter comes soon—shall we save this, lay it by,  
Keep all we can of these haze gold yellows?

## WINTER GOLD

The same gold of summer was on the winter hills,  
the oat straw gold, the gold of slow sun change.

The stubble was chilly and lonesome,  
the stub feet clomb up the hills and stood.

The flat cry of one wheeling crow faded and came,  
ran on the stub gold flats and faded and came.

Fade-me, find-me, slow lights rang their changes  
on the flats of oat straw gold on winter hills.





# WIND, SEA, AND SKY





WINDS OF THE WINDY CITY  
from *The Windy City*

Winds of the Windy City,  
come out of the prairie,  
all the way from Medicine Hat.  
Come out of the inland sea blue water,  
come where they nickname a city for you.

Corn wind in the fall,  
come off the black lands,  
come off the whisper of the silk hangers,  
the lap of the flat spear leaves.

Blue water wind in summer,  
come off the blue miles of lake,  
carry your inland sea blue fingers,  
carry us cool,  
carry your blue to our homes.

White spring winds,  
come off the bag wool clouds,  
come off the running melted snow,  
come white as the arms of snow-born children.

Gray fighting winter winds,  
come along on the tearing blizzard tails,

the snouts of the hungry hunting storms,  
come fighting gray in winter.

Winds of the Windy City,  
Winds of corn and sea blue,  
Spring wind white  
    and fighting winter gray,  
Come home here—  
    they nickname a city for you.

CHILDREN OF THE WIND  
*from The People, Yes*

On the shores of Lake Michigan  
high on a wooden pole, in a box,  
two purple martins had a home  
and taken away down to Martinique  
and let loose, they flew home,  
thousands of miles to be home again.

And this has lights of wonder  
echo and pace and echo again.  
The birds let out began flying  
north north-by-west north  
till they were back home.  
How their instruments told them  
of ceiling, temperature, air pressure,  
how their control-boards gave them  
reports of fuel, ignition, speeds,  
is out of the record, out.

Across spaces of sun and cloud,  
in rain and fog, through air pockets,  
wind with them, wind against them,  
stopping for subsistence rations,  
whirling in gust and spiral,  
these people of the air,  
these children of the wind,  
had a sense of where to go and how,  
how to go north north-by-west north,  
till they came to one wooden pole,  
till they were home again.

## DOCKS

Strolling along  
By the teeming docks,  
I watch the ships put out.  
Black ships that heave and lunge  
And move like mastodons  
Arising from lethargic sleep.

The fathomed harbor  
Calls them not nor dares  
Them to a strain of action,  
But outward, on and outward,  
Sounding low-reverberating calls,  
Shaggy in the half-lit distance,  
They pass the pointed headland,  
View the wide, far-lifting wilderness  
And leap with cumulative speed  
To test the challenge of the sea.

Plunging,  
Doggedly onward plunging,  
Into salt and mist and foam and sun.

## FROM THE SHORE

A lone gray bird,  
Dim-dipping, far-flying,  
Alone in the shadows and grandeurs and tumults  
Of night and the sea  
And the stars and storms.

Out over the darkness it wavers and hovers,  
Out into the gloom it swings and batters,  
Out into the wind and the rain and the vast,  
Out into the pit of a great black world,  
Where fogs are at battle, sky-driven, sea-blown,  
Love of mist and rapture of flight,  
Glories of chance and hazards of death  
On its eager and palpitant wings.

Out into the deep of the great dark world,  
Beyond the long borders where foam and drift  
Of the sundering waves are lost and gone  
On the tides that plunge and rear and crumble.



## FLUX

Sand of the sea runs red  
Where the sunset reaches and quivers.  
Sand of the sea runs yellow  
Where the moon slants and wavers.

SKY PRAYERS  
from *Good Morning, America*

Sea sunsets, give us keepsakes.

Prairie gloamings, pay us for prayers.

Mountain clouds on bronze skies—

Give us great memories.

Let us have summer roses.

Let us have tawny harvest haze in pumpkin time.

Let us have springtime faces to toil for and play for.

Let us have the fun of booming winds on long waters.

Give us dreamy blue twilights—

of winter evenings—

to wrap us in a coat of dreaminess.

Moonlight, come down—shine down, moonlight—

meet every bird cry and every song

calling to a hard old earth,

a sweet young earth.

## ROLLING CLOUDS

from *Sky Talk*

Wool white horses and their heads sag and roll,  
Snow white sheep and their tails drag far,  
Impossible animals ever more impossible—  
They walk on the sky to say How do you do?  
Or Good-by or Back-soon-maybe.

Or would you say any white flowers come  
more lovely than certain white clouds?  
Or would you say any tall mountains beckon,  
rise and beckon beyond certain tall walking clouds?

Is there any roll of white sea-horses equal to  
the sky-horse white of certain clouds rolling?

## BABY SONG OF THE FOUR WINDS

Let me be your baby, south wind.  
Rock me, let me rock, rock me now.  
Rock me low, rock me warm.  
Let me be your baby.

Comb my hair, west wind.  
Comb me with a cowlick.  
Or let me go with a pompadour.  
Come on, west wind, make me your baby.

North wind, shake me where I'm foolish.  
Shake me loose and change my ways.  
Cool my ears with a blue sea wind.  
I'm your baby, make me behave.

And you, east wind, what can I ask?  
A fog comfort? A fog to tuck me in?  
Fix me so and let me sleep.  
I'm your baby—and I always was.

## BROKEN SKY

The sky of gray is eaten in six places,  
Rag holes stand out.  
It is an army blanket and the sleeper  
slept too near the fire.

## SANTA FE SKETCH

The valley was swept with a blue broom to the west.

And to the west, on the fringes of a mesa sunset,  
there are blue broom leavings, hangover blue wisps—  
bluer than the blue floor the broom touched  
before and after it caught the blue sweepings.

The valley was swept with a blue broom to the west.

## SILVER POINT

The silver point of an evening star  
dropping toward the hammock of new moon  
    over Lake Okoboji,  
    over prairie waters in Iowa—  
it was framed in the lights  
    just after twilight.

## WIND SONG

Long ago I learned how to sleep,  
In an old apple orchard where the wind swept by counting  
its money and throwing it away,  
In a wind-gaunt orchard where the limbs forked out and listened  
or never listened at all,  
In a passel of trees where the branches trapped the wind into  
whistling, "Who, who are you?"  
I slept with my head in an elbow on a summer afternoon  
and there I took a sleep lesson.  
There I went away saying: I know why they sleep, I know  
how they trap the tricky winds.  
Long ago I learned how to listen to the singing wind and  
how to forget and how to hear the deep whine,  
Slapping and lapsing under the day blue and the night stars:  
Who, who are you?

Who can ever forget  
listening to the wind go by  
counting its money  
and throwing it away?





